

Imagine for a moment a barren world, drab and silent and empty. Then be thankful that Witham is a different world, another world - one where birds sing and flowers bloom, trees grow tall and little creatures flourish. A myriad of lovely colours, a symphony of gentle sound accompanies those who go in search.

This booklet introduces the reader to all of this, and more. But please remember -

Take nothing but photographs
Leave nothing but footprints
Spend nothing but time



ON THE WILD SIDE OF TOWN

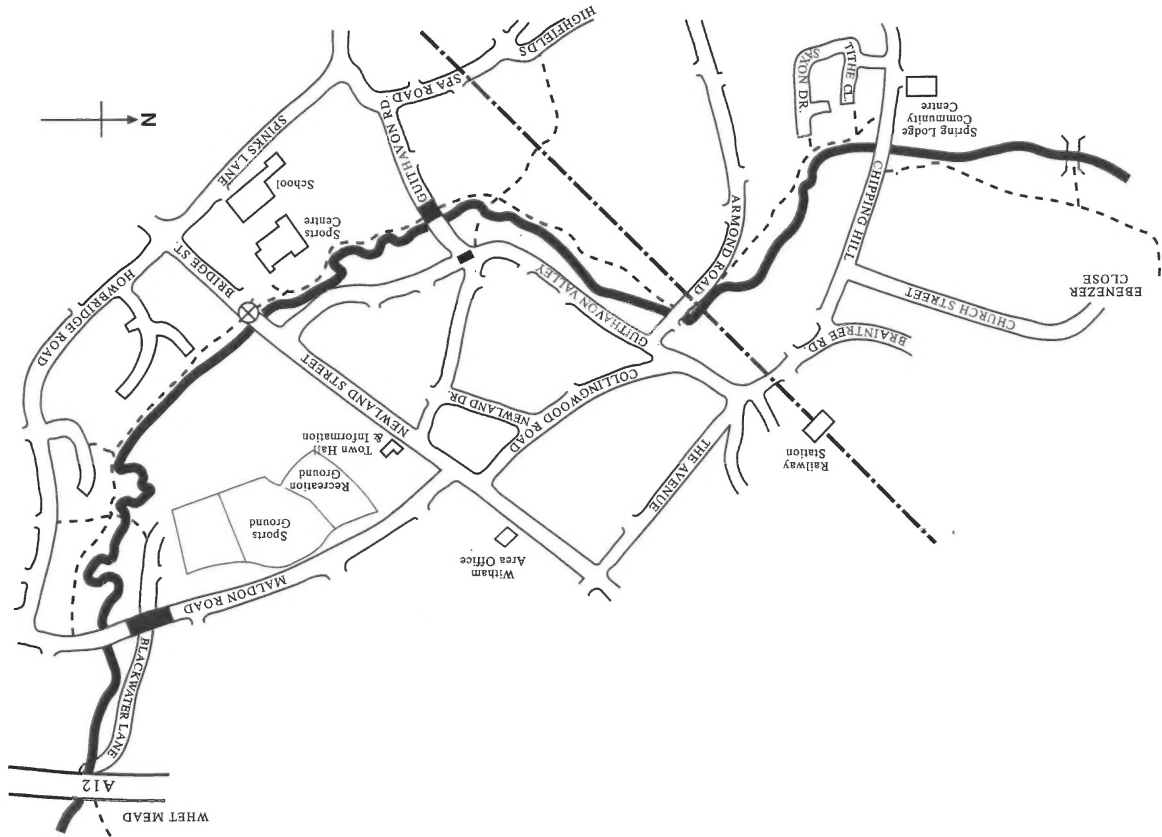
A GUIDE TO THE NATURAL WORLD
IN AND AROUND WITHAM

by Val Carpenter

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IN AND AROUND WITHAM

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I would also like to thank Keith Newbitt, who made the records of the Witham Natural History Society available to me, Helen Pitchforth, who provided additional information about the River Walk, and Avril Edge who read my first draft.

The photographs were taken by Richard Gerussi and Annie Northfield.

Any errors in the interpretation of the information I have received are mine.

Author's Note:

Although I was not born here I have lived in Witham for 50 years and, as a child, I enjoyed evening and Sunday afternoon walks with my parents through the fields and along the tracks of the countryside around the town. In this way I learned to love the countryside and all its creatures, but housing estates and tarmac roads now occupy the places where I roamed and played as a girl.

Throughout, I have chosen to give capital letters to common names in order to make them more visible in the text. I have mentioned many species of plants, birds, insects and mammals but I have made no attempt to write about everything there is to find.

INTRODUCTION

As we go about our daily life what do we respond to without being really aware? In a busy road it may be the breath-taking sight of a tree in full flower, heralding the arrival of Spring, or it may be a bird singing its heart out above the noise of the traffic.

At home we are willing to share our space with other creatures. We put out tit-bits to feed the birds and look forward to their visits. We dig out a fish pond and find that it attracts frogs and dragonflies. For our pleasure we grow brightly coloured flowers, natives of some far-away land, and in doing so we tempt the bees and butterflies.

It seems odd that our favourite garden plants, exotic in their foreign loveliness, are nothing more than weeds in their country of origin. By the same token, our wildflowers have also been taken to far-away shores where they are coveted and treasured, wonderful in their own unique beauty.

Around the town - only a short distance from every front door - the natural world, our natural world is there for everyone to enjoy. It's on the wild side of town.

This booklet introduces Witham's natural history and explains what there is to find.

GENERAL NATURAL HISTORY

The natural world is all around and, as interesting as they may be, we don't have to watch wildlife programmes on the television to enjoy it. The English countryside, and the various animals, flowers, birds and insects it supports, is just as fascinating. Visitors come from overseas especially to see it, and the seeds of our wild flowers are in great demand. English people who live abroad feel nostalgic about the scenes of pastoral England, and yet we take it for granted because it is with us all the time.

In Witham we are fortunate to have so many diverse habitats which provide the specialised environments to maintain a rich and varied wildlife. Thousands of years of human activity has destroyed the original wilderness but over recent years, with forethought and determination, the natural world has been encouraged and brought right into the heart of town.

The River Walk is a country walk from one end of the town to the other, like a green ribbon where wildlife abounds. It provides a diversity of habitats; wet or dry, impoverished soil or fertile, open spaces or dense growth. The various flora it supports attracts populations of birds, animals and insects adapted to these specific environments. In a busy town-centre road there is a sleepy haven for wild life in the Closed Churchyard. Further afield, on the outskirts of town, there is a designated nature reserve and, in another direction, a piece of land has been planted as a publicly-owned wood.

Nowadays enlightened management of roadside verges allows grasses and wild flowers to grow unhindered, although for safety a roadside strip is kept short. The verges have become 'corridors' for wildlife with hedges thickened by more planting of native trees and shrubs. Along the A12 dual-carriageway planting schemes not only bring visual relief for motorists but are an active encouragement to wildlife.

Our local natural history - its plants, birds, animals and insects - are due to the underlying geology of the town. Boulder clay soil, sand and gravel deposits and our climate determines what will survive.

THREE THOUSAND YEARS OF HUMAN ACTIVITY

People have lived in Witham for three thousand years and their activities have shaped the landscape, produced the countryside we know today and built the town's environment.

The earliest evidence of this is the layout of the fields and trackways, and the pre-historic settlement based at the river crossing below what is known as Chipping Hill. As they cleared the land they left trees and bushes to become field boundaries. In the Iron Age the steep embankment on the bend in the river was reinforced and became a hill fort with defensive ditches and baffle entrances.

Then the Romans came. They usually by-passed native settlements to avoid delay in constructing their straight roads and at Witham it lay about half a mile from the original place of habitation. A few Romans liked the river valley at Witham and built their villas within sight of the hill fort. They even took over a tribal religious site, at a spring near their straight road, for the worship of their own gods.

When the Roman occupation ended their roads and villas were abandoned, but the native people carried on living where and how they had always done. Then the Saxons came and settled among them. Towards the end of the first millennium AD the old Iron Age hill fort once again became a vital defensive; this time against the threat of a Viking attack, expected to come up the river from Maldon.

After the Norman Conquest the new overlords determined the parish boundary using the existing Iron Age field system with its boundary hedges and woodland. The parish church was built at Chipping Hill, possibly on the site of an earlier wooden Saxon church. The walls mainly consist of flints with stone quoins and embrasures, but the ever-practical Normans had no qualms about incorporating the Roman bricks they found lying around.

The parish was given to the Knights Templars, and it was they who sold off parcels of land beside the long-abandoned Roman road. They called this stretch of speculative development the New Land, and commercial and domestic properties were built along it. A trackway from Chipping Hill connected the two settlements.

The town had quite a hey-day in Tudor times, when it became an important cloth producer, and again in Georgian times when the English throne passed to a succession of German princes. The court regularly travelled between London and Harwich, and Witham became an important staging post.

In Queen Victoria's time the railway came to Witham, the route being drawn up and the land bought in the 1830's. The surveyors for the Eastern Counties Railway Company had no thought for the antiquity of the landscape and sliced through the middle of the Iron Age hill fort with their railway line, the railway station being built on one of its ramparts. The waste soil was used to create the embankment further long the line.

The old Roman road was called Newland Street and with the national numbering system of the country's roads it became part of the A12. By the 1950's the increasing traffic made Newland Street a bottleneck. A by-pass was built and more fields were taken into the sprawl of housing and industrial areas.

Over three millennia humans have shaped and moulded the landscape around Witham and their efforts have given us the countryside we know today.



THE RIVER WALK

As the town expanded in the late 1950's and 1960's what were once cornfields, pasture and water meadows from the town's agricultural past was bought by the former Witham Urban District Council. The intention was to "preserve a magnificent rural landscape within the centre of Witham for the benefit of present and future generations". This public open space runs like a green ribbon beside the River Brain for more than two miles from Ebenezer Close, on the Braintree side of town, to Maldon Road.

The old field-boundary hedges still stand and, among the grasses of the old pastures and meadows common Daisies and Buttercups can be found everywhere. Scarlet Pimpernels, also known as Poor Man's Weather as it closes its flowers when the sun goes in, are to be found close to the ground. So are the bright blue flowers of the Speedwell, a true British native wild flower. The grass is also spangled with its smaller cousin, the Common Field Speedwell. And what meadow would be complete without Clover?

It is in the rough, seemingly neglected areas, where the greatest diversity of plant life develops, and which is able to support the equally diverse bird, insect and mammal populations. Consequently, the River Walk is deliberately managed in ways designed to preserve and conserve the wildlife that abounds. Its length is divided into distinct and varied sections.

Ebenezer Close to Chipping Hill

At the start of the walk, in the boggy Alder copse by the iron railings, there is a great colony of Butterbur. Its leaves grow to an enormous size, sometimes each one is three feet across, and in olden days they were used for wrapping butter - hence its common name. In March and April clusters of pink flowers appear at the top of short leafless stems.

This part of the River Walk is managed quite simply, so that it merges with the distant views across to Faulkbourne and encourages the natural flora and fauna. There is a never-failing spring in the first meadow which bubbles up through fine, gritty sand then flows into the river. Other streams are crossed by the paths, and old field boundaries are marked by hedges of Elder, Hawthorn, Bramble, Dog Rose, Blackthorn, Hazel and Ivy.

Blackbirds, members of the Tit family, Thrushes, Robins, Starlings, Sparrows and various Finches are easy to spot. The country verse about the cuckoo holds true; its arrival can clearly be heard in April and in June it does change its tune! But it is rarely seen, as is the shy little Wren. On one day alone 35 species of birds were identified along the River Walk and many others are known to be there.

Wild flowers thrive - the limited cutting of the grass allows them to set seed - and through the seasons they take their turn to beautify the meadows. Their common names were given by generations of country folk.

In spring the shiny yellow flowers of Celandines stay close to the ground. Marsh Marigold inhabits where its name describes and is accompanied by the pretty pale lilac Cuckoo Flower, also known as Ladies' Smock. In drier places, as the weather warms, the dainty white flower 'platforms' of Queen Anne's Lace (sometimes called Cow Parsley) rise tall above the grass, joined by the yellow daisy-type flowers of Colt's Foot. Both Red and White Campion are easy to see. Dove's Foot Cranesbill has delicate pink flowers and small, scalloped soft round leaves. Very similar is the Pyrenean Cranesbill but its flowers are larger and the petals are deeply notched. Their relation, Herb Robert, also has pink flowers and they all have the tell-tale seed-head 'beak' that forms when the flowers go over.

The evergreen leaves of Ground Ivy are kidney or heart-shaped, unlike true ivy, and showy mauve flowers appear in whorls on one side of the leafy stems.

As summer gets into its stride there's Water Forget-me-not, as blue as garden bedding, and scented white Meadowsweet. Gipsywort, its pink flowers in clusters all the way up the stems in the angle formed by its leaves, looks like mint but isn't. Later, the Rosebay Willow Herb (sometimes called Fireweed) turns the valley floor below the Church to a deep purple-pink before its white, hairy seeds blow in the wind.

As the grasses grow taller and reach their own peak, the meadows turn into a diaphanous sea of hazy shapes and colours to sway gently in the breeze. They too have delightful names such as Sheep's Fescue, Cock's Foot and Foxtail. Creeping Bent conjures up all sorts of images, but it is Sweet Vernal Grass that gives us the scent of new-mown hay. The occasional plants of Teasel rise tall above the flowery meadows and remind us of Witham's long-gone cloth trade.

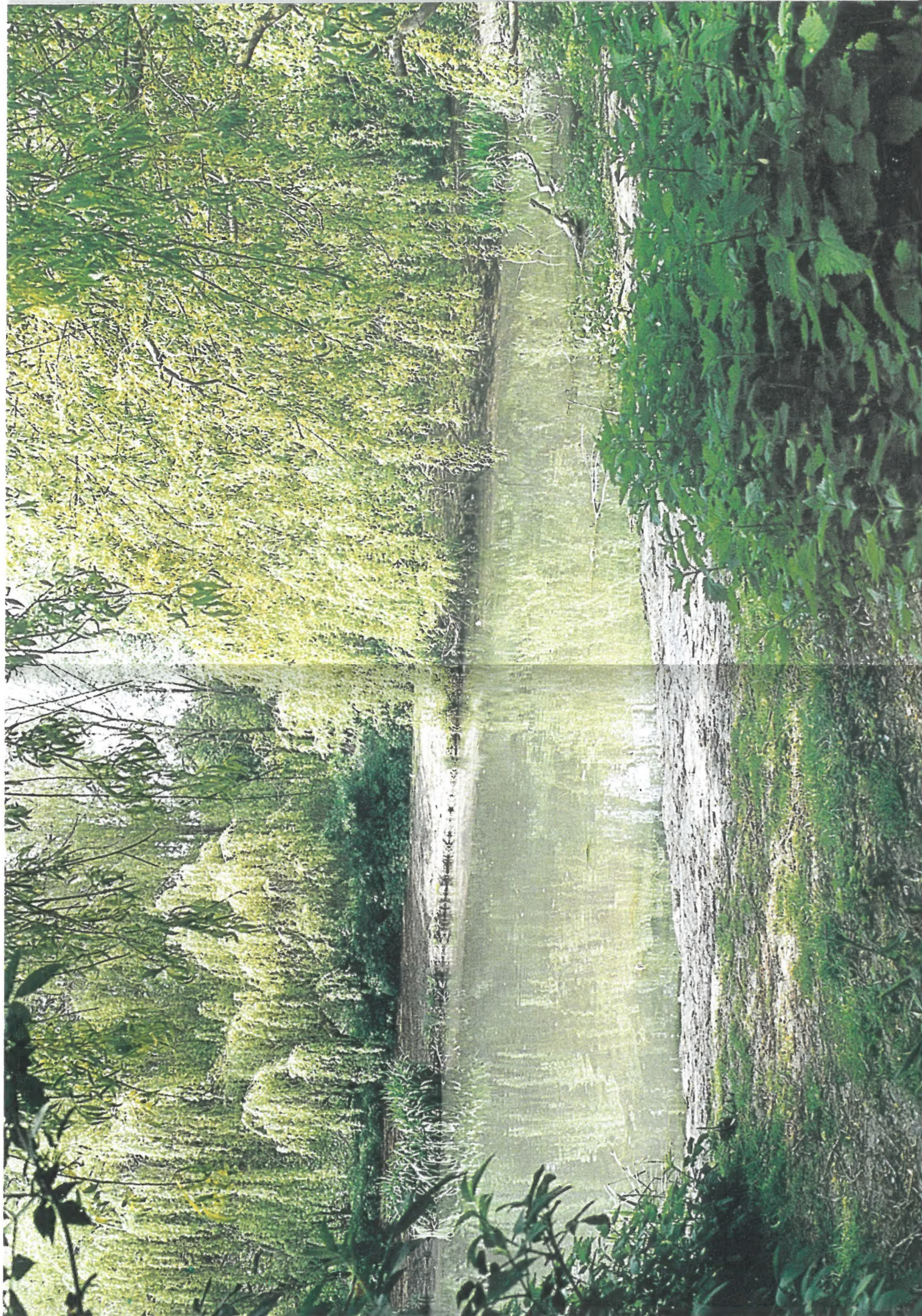
By the river bank are fast-growing White Willows, Alders and, nearer the mill house, Weeping Willows. These trees are an important factor in the stability of the river bank, their roots binding the soil and reducing erosion. Their leaves and flowers add to the diversity of wild life and their bare winter outlines add stature to the flat valley bottom. The 'high' path goes through what was once the Church's glebeland orchard and although the trees are old and gnarled their blossoms add to the springtime scene.

Under the 5-arch bridge, in its cool and shady dampness, mosses cling to the brickwork. Where the sun warms the walls various lichens grow.

Chipping Hill to Armond Road Viaduct

Houses and gardens are quite close to the River Walk along this section, and the old fields are close cut to look more in keeping with the domestic view. Along the banks the grass is left to grow long and almost hides the water from human eyes. As with the wider part upstream, the river bank environment is home for a multitude of creatures.

Overleaf: Summer magnificence at the pond.



Dragonflies and Damsel Flies, their wings a shimmering transparency, skim the water. Water Voles are seen making V-shaped ripples on the surface to the sound of a 'plop' as they enter the water from their hole in the bank. A special sight is the sparrow-sized Kingfisher, an iridescent turquoise on its back and wings, and orange-chestnut underparts highlighted by a white throat and neck patch. Its stubby shape, all body and head but almost no tail, belies its perfect dive from a vantage point on an overhanging branch.

Standing sentinel on the river bank near the bridge is an Alder, a tree that is often found by river and pond banks. Their seed are adapted to float in water, to find a foothold further down stream. Through the field boundary hedge, the path continues to a 3-arch bridge at Moat Farm which replaces the shallow ford.

Until the 1960's what is now Armond Road was a track from the bridge through the cornfields to Highfields Road. The railway viaduct's arches have always been a favoured nesting place for the summer-visiting Swallows and House Martins which build their nests with pellets of mud.

Armond Road to Bridge Street

Crossing over Armond Road, the River Walk follows a narrow piece of land between the river at Guithavon Valley and the railway embankment. Although the river bank looks much the same as earlier stretches, the soil either side of the River Walk is poor and thin. This area used to be the town's rubbish tip, which explains why it appears higher and somewhat like a plateau. The thin covering of soil supports a large, dense colony of Stinging Nettles interspersed with Dock (always found growing with nettles and used to relieve its companions' stings), Great Willowherb, Teasels and bushes of Broom. These are typical plants of poor wasteland.

It may seem odd that so many nettles are allowed to grow here but they are the food plant for the caterpillar stage of many of our butterflies, such as Red Admirals, Painted Ladies, Small Tortoiseshells, Peacocks and Commas - their patterned wings coloured by nature's finest artist.

Have you noticed how a butterfly flies? Some are constant flutterers whilst others make a few lazy flaps then glide for some distance.

Along this stretch of the river Woodpeckers can be clearly heard, rapping tree trunks in their search for grubs and insects under the bark. Both the Green Woodpecker and its relative the Greater Spotted (sometimes known as the Pied) Woodpecker can be found along the River Walk.

Through into the next field and the main interest is the pond, although the alder wood has become a bird sanctuary. The pond is man-made and now the home of Moorhens and Mallards and an assortment of cross-breed Ducks. By the bridge is a large stand of blue-flowered Comfrey.

Beyond Guithavon Road, the River Walk once again becomes a wilder, more natural place. Approaching the Sports Centre the wilderness is tamed by grass cutting but near the roadbridge there are colonies of Winter Heliotrope, sometimes called Cherry Pie, which describes its

The Mill Lane butterflycup meadow

Photo: Helen Pitchforth



scent. Its pale lilac flowers appear on bare stems in the middle of winter before the leaves push through the soil, attracting insects that emerge from hibernation on warm sunny days.

Bridge Street to Maldon Road

From Bridge Street the view of the river in the first meadow gives a false impression; it looks straight. The 'real' river meanders out of sight through the rough meadow on the other side, whilst the straight watercourse is the old mill stream of Howbridge Hall Mill, now long gone. The land between the original, winding channel and the present river is left wild and has become a natural nature reserve covering several acres.

Through the field boundary hedge the true river is met again. Over the last few years the hard path has collapsed in several places and an ugly-looking concrete 'wall' some metres in length stands useless in the middle of the river. It was a futile effort to support and stabilise the bank, but the river's current worked its way behind the concrete reinforcement.

The main pathway of the River Walk ends at Sauls Bridge but before reaching it a spur path crosses the river to connect the town park. The wild naturalness helps to disguise the gardens and seamlessly melds with the rough meadow.

There are several large trees in this section - Alders, Sycamores and Hornbeams, Large-leaved Limes, Ashes and Poplars - along with the lower growing Elder and Hawthorn.

The River

The bed of the river, littered with stones, has its own flora. Fennel Pondweed is rooted in the river bed and flows in the current like the hair of an underwater swimmer, whilst Reedmace stands tall against

the river bank with upright brown 'sausages' or pokers of close packed flowers. Bur-reed, Sedges and the yellow-flowered Flag Iris grow in the shallow margins, providing cover to Sticklebacks and Gudgeon, Dace and Minnows as they swim in their favourite places.

Brooklime (a water type of Speedwell), Water Starwort and Water Figwort are found there too, as can Water Cress. Their common names betray their preferred habitat.

High summer near Saul's Bridge.



The Meadows

All along the River Walk the night-time feeders are about. Bats skim the river and fields for insects, their radar system enabling them to fly blind and miss objects, and moths search for flowers' nectar just as the butterflies did by day. Hedgehogs snuffle among the undergrowth and other creatures of the night wake from their sleep to spend the hours of darkness going about their business. Mice, Voles and Shrews have their homes in the meadows as do Grass Snakes and Lizards, active by sunning themselves on a sunlit stone or brick.

Slow worms look like snakes, their bodies as smooth and shiny as polished pewter, but they have no markings and are quite harmless. They too like to sunbathe in a warm place.

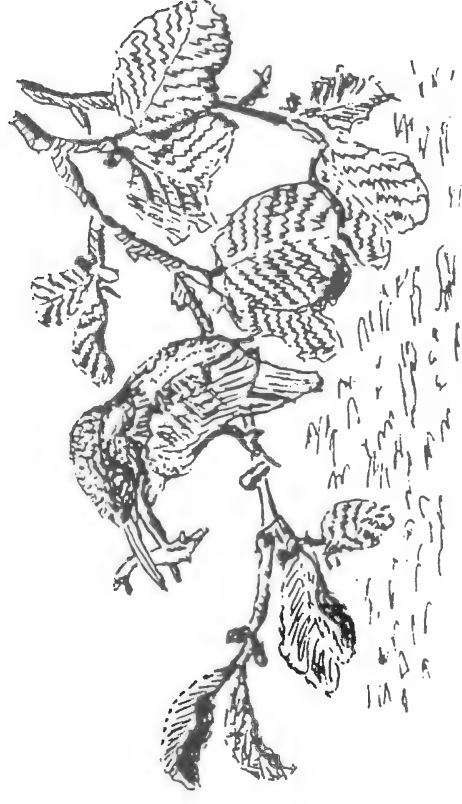
The cycle of life, be it by day or by night, never stops. As high summer turns to autumn, trees and bushes bear their fruit, eagerly feasted upon by the birds, insects and numerous mammals. Crab Apples and Elderberries, Hips and Haws, Bird Cherries and Acorns all provide sustenance for the coming winter. Seeds too, provide their bounty; Teasels and Thistles, Willowherb and Groundsel attract flocks of colourful Goldfinches and other seed eaters. Of the annual flowers and grasses, enough seeds are scattered to grow again the following year.

As winter approaches the creatures that hibernate prepare for their long sleep. Insects of all types find a nook or crevice. Grey Squirrels, now found all along the River Walk, continue to store caches of nuts and fruits, and Hedgehogs, having fattened on fallen fruits and insects, find a place to make a nest of dry leaves to sleep the winter through.

Life slows in winter's cold harsh weather, bringing hungry wildlife into our gardens, offering a lifeline with food and shelter to many creatures. In the meadows plants die back to the root, true to their herbaceous nature, leaving just a skeleton of flower stems to be rimed by frost before collapsing in winter gales. On the banks of the river, and in the old field-boundary hedges, trees and bushes stand gaunt and

seemingly lifeless. The year turns and the lengthening days bring winter to an end.

Footnote: All those years ago, when the fields were first bought up to form the River Walk, the 'founding fathers' could never have imagined how important their aim of a piece of the countryside in the heart of town would become as the town expands more and more.



WHETMEAD NATURE RESERVE

At the end of Blackwater Lane, off Maldon Road, a triangular piece of land about 10 hectares (25 acres) became isolated from the surrounding farm land when the by-pass was built. Its two other boundaries are formed by the River Brain and the River Blackwater and the area used to be a rubbish tip. When the tip was full, soil was spread over the surface and then left to be colonised by wind-blown seeds; those brought on the feed and fur of animals, or in birds' droppings. Native trees and bushes were also planted, particularly alongside the by-pass and the river.

A lagoon was created and surrounded by reeds to offer still, open water and a jetty was erected to project over the water for closer inspection of the water life. The little insect called Water Boatman seems to row across the water, much to the amusement of school children who visit. Cormorants and Herons are easy to spot fishing the rivers and lagoon.

The rough grassland has been colonised by over 150 species of plants, some of which are rarely found in Essex, including Dyer's Rocket which produces a yellow dye. Grass Hoppers and Crickets can be heard in summer and, in common with the butterflies already mentioned elsewhere, there are Essex Skippers, Meadow Browns and Common Blues to be seen. The shrubby areas are more suited to the Speckled Wood, Orange Tip and Gatekeeper butterflies.

Foxes have also established themselves in this area, roaming the nearby meadows and industrial estate in their search for food.

The Harvest Mouse, Wood Mouse, Common Shrew and Pigmy Shrew hide themselves from human eyes.

Whetmead is not a beauty spot but a good example of what can be done to return a piece of land to nature, providing a home for many species that have become quite rare.



General view of Whetmead across lagoons



THE CLOSED CHURCHYARD

Right in the centre of town is a secret haven for wildlife. It is the closed churchyard of the former All Saints Church in Guithavon Street, which was granted a Royal Order in 1991 to declare the churchyard closed. Access is through a gate in the wall of the Newlands Precinct car park and there is another gate in Lockram Lane.

Trees and Bushes, Climbers and Scramblers

To the rear of the church are four magnificent trees; a Cedar of Lebanon, an Oak, growing naturally straight and tall (not pollarded to form a stag's head crown), a Sweet Chestnut and a Sycamore, all reminders of a long-gone private garden. Lime trees stand sentinel near the car park wall, their branches cut back to make tall columns of summer leaves, and Hollies, Yews, Ashes, Hawthorns and Crab Apples can also be found. A line of young Oaks and Ashes has been planted alongside the car park wall beyond the gate. Climbing the trunks of old trees or clinging to walls is the common Ivy, which changes in character when it reaches the top of its support and produces clusters of greenish flowers. These are pollinated by Wasps then ripen as black berries to be eaten by birds.

The ubiquitous Elder has self-seeded into thickets with Blackberries and Dog Roses, which grow long, arching stems to flower and fruit in the sun. The sweet-scented Honeysuckle spirals around another's stems, and weaving through all their branches is the Large Bindweed, its white trumpets the largest of all British wild flowers. They stay open at night to attract the *Convolvulus Hawk Moth*.

Scrambling around is the Woody Nightshade with clusters of small flowers like yellow-centred purple stars. The berries start green, become yellow then turn red and remain on the plant long after its leaves have fallen. White Bryony has tendrils with which to climb and

has tiny white flowers and ivy-shaped leaves. It too has long-lasting red berries. Both are poisonous!

The Wild Flower Meadow

Over the years, self-sown grasses and flowers of all kinds have colonised the churchyard. However, an area has been cleared of headstones and sown as a wild flower meadow. Bluebells and Buttercups, Garlic Mustard and Germander Speedwell, White Deadnettle and Lamb's Lettuce can be found among others. In shadier places Snowdrops, Primroses and Violets thrive, as does the Cuckoo Pint with its large arrow-shaped leaves. In summer thistle-like Knapweeds, mauve Field Scabious and purple Common Mallow can be seen as well as pink Corncockle, the yellow Toadflax and the blue Forget-me-nots.

A rare native has been deliberately introduced, the Lesser Calamint, transplanted from Saint Nicolas's to maintain a connection with the parish church.

Headstones and Lichens

Depending on the type of stone, various Lichens have colonised the headstones and are home to over 40 different types. They come in various shades of greens and greys, yellows which range from pale lemon to deep ochre, white and even red.

There is something vaguely familiar, though, about some of the headstones dotted about among the others. Of a simple curved shape, their whiteness and surrounding tidiness draws the curious visitor. These are the headstones of eleven Witham men who subsequently died of their wounds in the two great wars. Only their regimental badge and a brief inscription is carved on each slab of Portland stone. Witham Town Council maintains them on behalf of the Commonwealth War Graves Commission.

CHURCHYARD CONSERVATION

A churchyard is an important oasis for plant and animal life, particularly in a town centre, but it needs to be managed and maintained in a sympathetic way. Even if some graves are still visited after a churchyard has been closed, allowing nature to take its course will result in rampant-growing species quickly smothering other plants. Trees and bushes produce lots of seeds and can quickly turn an open piece of land into a scrubby wood. The diversity of habitats can soon be lost; sometimes nature needs a helping hand.

Grass cutting should be delayed until after the annual wild flowers have set seed, by which time the perennials will have had chance to build

Management at All Saints



up their nutrient reserves. Mowings and prunings should be left in a neglected corner to provide a sheltered place for insects and animals. Piles of logs also offer important refuges until they eventually rot away.

Ferns growing at the base of shady walls will do no harm as their roots are very shallow and cannot undermine the foundations. Unseen spores of Mosses will quickly colonise damp surfaces and later become a soft lining for birds' nests.

In a county with no natural stone, gravestones and walls are the only places where Lichens can grow and they take many years to colonise a surface. They should be appreciated for their beautiful patterns and subtle colours but, sadly, Lichens are often regarded as the grime of years of neglect. Cleaning gravestones, to rid them of their encrustations, is a tragedy.



JAMES COOKE WOOD

Witham Town Council were pleased to participate in the community woodland initiative. With grants from the Forestry Commission a 14 acre site in Howbridge Hall Road was purchased, adjacent to Oliver's Farm, off Maldon Road. Local organisations and people from the town helped with the planting of almost 6,000 trees on Saturday, 4th December, 1993. Some of the trees were specially planted in memory of loved ones.

Already native grasses and wild flowers are colonising the area and eventually the young saplings will become a woodland feature on the flat arable landscape.

Who was James Cooke? He was a 16 year old lad, working with the cows at Oliver's Farm, and convicted of arson after a spate of fires around the town, including one at his employer's barn. He was held at Chelmsford Prison, but still the fires continued. Despite requests for clemency, and the Witham Magistrate, Sir Williams Luard, trying to obtain a Royal Pardon, the lad was hung on 27th March, 1829 - by order of the judge, as an example to others!



ROADSIDE VERGES

Witham, being a town in the country, offers wildlife a variety of environments. There is a choice for both the urban resident and the country dweller because Mother Nature hates a vacuum and will always exploit a space.

By Pavements and Buildings

Around the town there are many magnificent mature trees, remnants of the pleasure gardens of earlier times, when it was fashionable to plant an arboretum of species being brought into this country from abroad. The trees of the town's park are the only ones remaining in their original setting.

The Cedar of Lebanon which grows in Newland Street still retains a certain majesty despite the proximity of the Police Station and other buildings. Elsewhere there are fine examples of Horse Chestnuts from the Balkans, Holm Oaks native to the Mediterranean lands and the False Acacia, which was introduced from eastern America. The Walnut comes from Asia Minor and was first introduced by the Romans. Trees with leaves of a different colour became popular and the Copper Beech, although an English tree, was a favourite. The pollarded Limes in Newland Street still scent the air as they once did for visitors to the long-gone Grove mansion.

More recently, little pockets of spare land on our housing estates have been planted with ornamental shrubs and trees, including various types of Laurels and Flowering Cherries from Japan, and Maples from Norway and Canada. The winter-flowering evergreen Viburnum hails from the Mediterranean as does the Tamarisk which grows near Tesco's car park, a haze of pink blossom obliterating its feathery leaves in May and June. The berrying Firethorns and Cotoneasters are natives of China, whilst the various Hebes originate from New Zealand. The Rowan and Silver Birch are British trees, although they are not common to Essex, and they too have been planted. A rampant garden escapee, the white late-



Shelduck and Mallard on the pond.

Large Skipper Butterfly



summer flowering Russian Vine, gloriously smothers a hedge and climbs to the top of the telegraph pole on the corner of Armond Road, with ambitions to cross the road!

It doesn't seem to matter too much where in the world these trees and bushes originate, they all offer something to Witham's wildlife be it food and shelter, a nook and cranny, or the ideal place to build a nest.

Insects abound, too numerous to mention, but look for the Ladybird which comes in a variety of guises, not just the common red one with black spots. The silvery trails of snails can be seen across pavements and up fences. Ant nests erupt, a pile of dry soil thrown up between cracks and path edges and countless winged forms take to the air, whilst Daddy-Long-Legs emerge from the grass in September.

Many birds have taken to town life, and the common hedgerow birds are now garden birds. Pigeons are just at home with roofs and windowsills as they were with the sea cliffs and ledges from which they originated. Various Gulls come inland to feed. A relatively new arrival is becoming a much-loved garden bird, the Collared Dove. Before the 1930's it was restricted to parts of the Balkans but has now colonised the whole of Europe and came to England in 1955.

Away From the Town Centre

Outside the built-up areas the roadside verges take on a countryside look and on the edges of housing estates there are still some country lanes. Mixed hedges of Hazel, Blackthorn, Hawthorn, Dog Rose and Elder are common. Field Maple, Ash, Crab Apple and Bird Cherry add height, whilst Elms are growing again after the ravages of Dutch Elm disease. In the hedge at Hatfield Road, a purple-leaved Cherry Plum can be seen, and in places Horse Chestnuts have been planted. The most majestic of all is the Oak, especially when pollarded to form a stag's head crown, and there are many lining the roads.

The bypass has plantings of the Wayfaring Tree, which is really a large shrub, and the Gelder rose, which isn't a rose but got its common name from the Dutch province of Guelderland. There are also Dogwoods, once used to make 'dogs' or skewers, and Spindles, which was used to make spindles for the spinning of wool before the spinning wheel was invented.

Wild flowers not already mentioned include the yellow of Cowslip. Corn Sowthistle is also yellow, whilst another cornfield flower ousted to the verges is the scarlet Poppy, which only grows on disturbed ground. Its seeds lie dormant for years, waiting for roadside digging to activate them and bring them into flower again. The dingy-white flowers of Yarrow are common, as are the pink flowers of Bindweed. The tall plant with grey leaves and bobble-like flowers is called Mugwort or Wormwood!

Wreathing the hedgerows in late summer is our only native Clematis, Traveller's-joy. Its small white flowers are hardly worth a second glance, but when they turn into feathery seed-heads the plant's other name, Old Man's Beard, becomes apparent. In some places it grows with the wild Hop.

The black and white markings of the Magpie make it easy to spot, whilst a hovering bird is usually a Kestrel. Rooks, Crows and Jackdaws eat roadside carrion, usually Rabbits, but also Foxes and Badgers. The Stoat and the smaller Weasel have an unmistakable undulating movement as they run across the road and are so fast they are seldom hit by cars. At night-time Owls can sometimes be heard but they are seldom seen.

Roadside Management

Around the town local contractors prune the trees and shrubs, and sometimes tree surgery is necessary to take out a diseased or dying specimen. The grass cutting of roadside strips and open spaces is almost a weekly event.

Outside the town Essex County Council controls a management policy which encourages wild flowers. Roadside verges are often the only remaining places where common cornfield flowers now grow and grass cutting regimes are practised for the benefit of the plants. However, for the safety of the motorist, a metre-wide strip is cut short at the edge of the road.

Modern hedgerow management looks quite brutal. Machinery flails the stems and branches but new growth quickly heals the scars, even when cut quite close to the ground, and the hedgerow is soon regenerated. Landowners, now, are encouraged to restore their hedgerows for the benefit of the countryside and the wildlife it supports.

Broad Banded Darter Dragonfly



FLOWERING PLANTS

Alkanet
Agrimony, Common
Agrimony, Hemp
Anemone, Wood
Arrowhead

Bartsia, Red
Bedstraw, Hedge
Bedstraw, Ladies
Bindweed, Black
Bindweed, Field
Bindweed, Great
Bindweed, Lesser
Birdfoot Trefoil
Bistort, Amphibious
Bittersweet
Blackthorn
Bluebell
Borage
Bristly ox-tongue
Brooklime
Bryony, Black
Bryony, White
Bugle
Burdock, Great
Bur-reed, Branched
Butchers Broom
Butterbur
Buttercup, Bulbous
Buttercup, Creeping
Buttercup, Meadow

Campion, Pink
Campion, Red
Campion, White
Carrot, Wild
Celandine, Greater
Celandine, Lesser

Centaury, Red
Chamomile, Wild
Chervil, Rough
Chickweed
Chickweed, Common
mouse-ear
Chickweed, Water
Chicory
Cinquefoil, Creeping

Clover, Red
Clover, White
Coltsfoot
Comfrey
Comfrey, Blue
Comfrey, Eastern
Corncockle
Cowslip
Cranesbill, Cut-leaved
Cranesbill, Dove's foot
Cranesbill, Mountain
Cranesbill, Pyrenean
Cranesbill, Shining
Cranesbill, Small
Flowered
Cress, Garden
Cress, Hairy Bittercress
Cress, Hoary
Cress, Water
Cress, Wavy
Cuckoo flower/Lady's
smock
Cuckoo Pint (Lords &
Ladies)

Daisy
Dandelion
Deadnettle, Red
Deadnettle, White
Dock, Amphibious
Dock, Broad Leaved
Dock, Common
Dock, Curled
Dock, Red Veined
Dog's Mercury
Dyer's Rocket
Evening Primrose

Fat hen
Fennel
Fennel Pondweed
Feverfew
Figwort, Common
Figwort, Water
Flag, Sweet
Flag, Yellow
Forget-me-not, Common
Forget-me-not, Water
Fleabane

Foxglove
Fumitory, Common
Fumitory, Ramping

Goat's beard
Goat's rue
Goosegrass
Greater Skullcap
Ground Elder
Groundsel
Gypsywort

Haresfoot
Hawkbitt, Autumnal
Hawksbeard, Beaked
Hawksbeard, Smooth
Hawkweed, Common
Heartsease
Hemlock
Herb Bennett
Herb Robert
Hogweed
Hogweed, Giant
Honeysuckle
Hop
Hop Trefoil
Horehound, Black
Horseradish

Knapweed (Hardhead)
Knotgrass, Japanese

Lambs Lettuce
Lesser Calamint
Lesser Periwinkle
Lettuce, Prickly
Loosestrife, Purple
Loosestrife, Yellow

Mallow, Common
Marguerite
Marsh Marigold
Mayweed, Scentless
Meadowsweet
Medick, Black
Medick, Spotted
Mellilot, Common
Mistletoe
Mugwort
Mullein, Great

Mustard, Black	Speedwell, Buxbaum's	GRASSES	Oak, Pedunculate	Tufted	Thrush, Song
Mustard, Garlic	Speedwell, Common	Cocksfoot	Oak, Sessile	Dunnock	Tit:
Mustard, Hedge	Speedwell, German	Creeping Bent	Oak, Turkey	Finches:	Blue
Mustard, Treacle	Speedwell, Ivy leaved	Foxtail		Bullfinch	Coal
	Speedwell, Wall	Sedge	Poplar, Black	Chaffinch	Great
Nettle, Dead (red)	Spurge Laurel	Sedge, Lesser Pond	Poplar, Lombardy	Goldfinch	Long Tailed
Nettle, Dead (white)	Spurge, Petty	Sheep's Fescue	Poplar, White	Greenfinch	Marsh
Nettle, Stinging	Spurge, Sun	Sweet Vernal Grass		Firecrest	Willow
Nightshade, Black	St. John's Wort		Rowan		Treecreeper
Nightshade, Woody	Star of Bethlehem	TREES AND SHRUBS			
Nipplewort	Stitchwort, Greater	Alder	Scots Pine	Goldcrest	Wagtail, Grey
	Stitchwort, Lesser	Alder, Grey	Silver Birch	Grebe, Great Crested	Wagtail, Pied
Orache, Halberd-leaved	Stonecrop, White	Ash	Sycamore	Gulls:	Warbler:
Orchid, Bee	Storksbill, Common	Beech		Blackheaded	Reed
Orchid, Early Purple	Storksbill, Musk	Bird Cherry	Tamarisk	Herring	Sedge
Orchid, Pyramidal	Sweet Briar	Blackthorn	Viburnum	Heron	Willow
Oxeye Daisy	Tare, Hairy	Blackberry	Walnut	Housemartin	Wood
	Tare, Smooth	Broom	Wayfaring Tree	Jackdaw	Whitethroat
Pansy, Field	Tare, Common		Wild Cherry	Jay	Woodpecker:
Parsley, Cow,	Teasel, Soft	Cedar of Lebanon	Wild Service Tree		Green
Parsley, Stone	Teasel, Wild	Cherry Plum	Willow:	Kestrel	Great Spotted
Pea, Everlasting	Thistle, Creeping	Chestnut, Horse	Crack	Kingfisher	Lesser Spotted
Pennycress, Field,	Thistle, Marsh	Chestnut, Sweet	Crick Bat	Linnat	Wood Pigeon
Peppermint, Field,	Thistle, Meadow	Cotoneaster	Sallow	Maggie	Wren
Peppermint, Hoary	Thistle, Musk	Crab Apple	Weeping	Moorhen	Yellow Hammer
Persicaria, Common	Thistle, Spear	Dogwood	White	Nightingale	
Pimpernel, Scarlet	Thyme, Common	Elder	Yew		WINTER VISITORS
Pineapple weed	Toadflax	Elm		Owl	Fieldfare
Plantain, Great	Travellers Joy	False Acacia	BIRDS	Partridge, Grey	Lapwing
Plantain, Ribwort		Firethorn	Blackbird	Partridge, Red Legged	Redwing
Plantain, Water	Vetch, Bush	Flowering Cherry	Blackcap	Pipit	Waxwing
Poppy, Field	Vetch, Common	Guelder Rose	Brambling	Read Bunting	
Ragged Robin	Vetchling, Grass	Hawthorn	Chiffchaff	Redpoll	MAMMALS
Ragwort, Common	Vetchling, Meadow	Hawthorn, Midland	Coot	Redshank	
Ragwort, Oxford	Violet, Common	Hazel	Crow, Carrion	Robin	Badger
Reedmae	Violet, Dog	Hebe	Cuckoo	Rook	Bat
Rest Harrow	Violet, Early	Holly		Sandmartin	Deer, Muntjac
Rose, Dog	Violet, Scented	Hornbeam	Dove:	Siskin	Fox
Rose, Field	Water Mint	Laurel	Collared	Snipe	Grey Squirrel
Rush, Common	Water Pond Weed	Lime	Stock	Sparrow, House	Hare
Rush, Wood	Willowherb, Broad-leaved	London Plane	Turtle	Sparrow, Tree	Hedgehog
Russian Vine	Willowherb, Great Hairy	Oak, Holm	Duck:	Sparrowhawk	Mole
	Willowherb, Rosebay		Mallard	Starling	Mouse:
Scabious, Field	Willowherb, Small		Pochard	Swallow	Harvest
Self Heal	Wood Sage		Shoveller	Swan	House
Shepherd's Purse	Woundwort, Hedge		Teal	Swift	Wood
Sorrel	Woundwort, Marsh			Thrush, Mistle	Yellow Necked
Sowthistle, Corn	Yarrow				Rabbit
Sowthistle, Smooth	Yellow Archangel				
Sowthistle, Spiny					

Shrew:
Common
Pigmy
Water
Squirrel
Stoat
Vole:
Bank
Field
Water
Weasel

INSECTS

Ant
Bees, Honey
Bees, Bumble
Caddis Fly
Capsid Bug
Cricket, Bush
Cricket, Rozells

Daddy Long Legs
Damselflies:
Azure
Banded
Demoiselle
Blue Tailed
Common Blue

Dragonflies:

Black Tailed Skimmer
Broad Bodied
Chaser
Darter, Common
Darter, Ruddy
Emperor
Hawker, Brown
Hawker, Migrant
Hawker, Southern

Grasshopper
Hover Fly
Lacewing
Ladybird - various
Pondskater
Shieldbugs
Snail

Wasp,
Common
Hornet
Parasitic (several
species)
Woodlice

MOTHS

Over 300 species are
to be found in Witham

Butterbur
Buff Tip
Cinnabar
Hawkmoth,
Elephant
Hummingbird
Lime
Poplar
Privet
Large Emerald
Maggie
Peppered
Red Underwing
Six Spot Burnet
Tiger

REPTILES/AMPHIBIANS

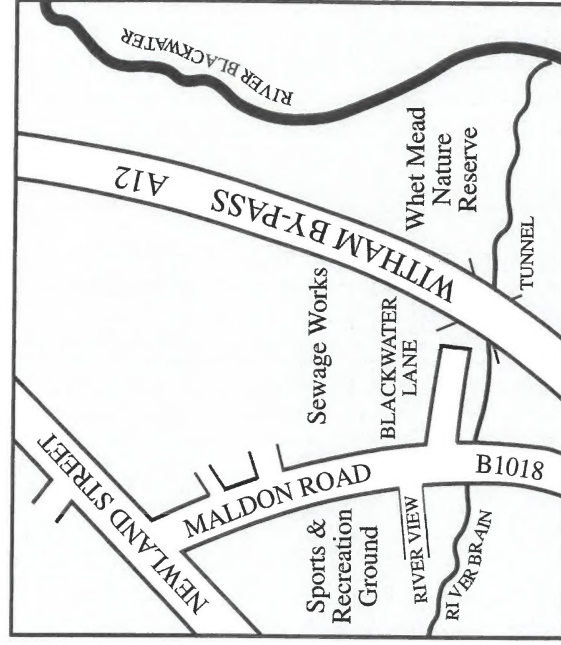
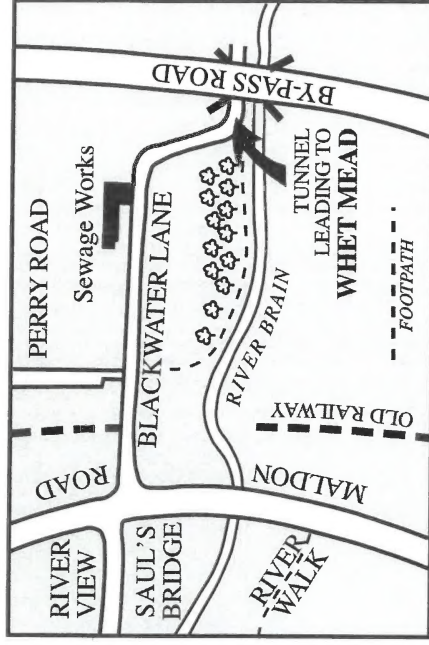
Frog
Grass Snake
Lizard, Common
Newt,
Common
Great Crested
Slowworm
Toad
FISH
Dace
Gudgeon
Minnow
Stickleback

BUTTERFLIES

Brimstone
Blues,
Common
Holly
Brown Argus
Browns,
Gatekeeper
Meadow
Brown
Ringlet
Small Heath
Speckled Wood

Clouded Yellow
Comma
Peacock
Painted Lady
Red Admiral
Skipper,
Essex
Large
Small
Small Tortoiseshell
Whites,
Large
Small
Green Veined
Orange Tip

**N.B. This is not a
definitive list of all
species to be found
in Witham**



The only approach to Whet Mead is via Blackwater Lane which is the turning off Maldon Road opposite River View.